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ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

The advancement of women through and in the programmes of the United Nations system

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "The advancement of women through and in the programmes of the United Nations system: What happens after the Fourth World Conference on Women?" (A/50/509).

* A/51/50.

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ANNEX

Comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination

I. GENERAL

1. The positive tone of the report (A/50/509) is welcomed. It offers a clear, accurate and balanced analysis of, and forthright information on, the present situation, as well as of many of the obstacles that still need to be addressed by the United Nations system.

2. While specific follow-up to the implementation of the report's recommendations was considered necessary, the mechanisms for their implementation and indicators for measuring progress would need to be discussed in more detail. As the report points out, there is a need for such information exchanges on successes and failures and on methodologies used and experience gained in bringing about change. The report's assessment of the current situation with regard to programmatic and resources aspects, as well as commitment to women's and gender responsive programmes, provides a good point of departure for future action.

3. One of the key points made in the report (A/50/509, para. 15) that deserves emphasis is:

> "... substantive women's programmes and women's status issues are intertwined ... substantive gender programmes will be stronger, better applied, and better understood if they are led and implemented by both men and women, especially at top management and programme management levels. Conversely, women's status and career advancement in an organization should be facilitated if that organization is already gender-aware and gender-oriented in its substantive programmes."

4. Through the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (CCAQ), the organizations have also acknowledged, as it was done in the report, that it is time to move beyond rhetoric and policy statements; many of the concrete, results-oriented actions called for in the report have already been embarked upon by CCAQ and others are being taken by individual organizations. However, the capacity of human resources departments to undertake new or enhanced initiatives is constrained now more than ever by the severe financial situation, which often is more greatly felt at the administrative level. For example, during the biennium 1996-1997 the personnel department of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) will be reduced by approximately one third and the Office of Human Resources Management of the United Nations Secretariat has been reduced by some 16 per cent within the past two years.

5. Recognition is rightly given throughout the report to enhancing performance management and to holding managers accountable, but as the report correctly emphasizes, policies and strategies must be properly communicated and the organizational culture must be transformed (para. 34). Human resource

development and training programmes must therefore be appropriately equipped in terms of financial and human resources to deliver these programmes.

6. Concerning the issue of increased accountability for management, CCAQ recalled at its eighty-second session that management competencies should be introduced as part of an integrated human resource strategy if organizations were to succeed in their bid to improve organizational performance. A prototype management competency framework and guidelines for performance appraisal have been made available to all organizations of the common system. It is especially noteworthy that the competency "integrity and international outlook", inter alia, includes the performance indicator "freedom from prejudice or bias regarding race, creed or gender".

7. Although the report's recognition that resources allocated for gender mainstreaming and women-targeted activities must match the size of the programme, many organizations and agencies found the report to be too "headquarters-centred", with insufficient attention to the particular challenges faced by operational entities at the country level. The role of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in supporting coordination of gender responsive programming at the country level needed to be emphasized.

8. The recognition given in the report to the responsibilities of governing bodies and Member States is also welcome (sect. III.8). Indeed, it was recognized earlier, in a report of 24 February 1992 on the status of women, including special measures for their recruitment, of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC), that the United Nations system could not do more than reflect the world community. Until such time as women participate in sufficient numbers in all disciplines and in decision-making positions at the national levels and as representatives in governmental and non-governmental bodies, organizations' efforts to bring about a more equitable representation of women in their secretariats will require intense efforts. Member States' responsibility in upholding the policy by placing gender balance on an equal footing with geographic distribution would also be a propelling force.

II. COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 (b)

9. At its nineteenth session in January 1996, the CCAQ Subcommittee on Staff Training discussed trends and developments in staff training in gender-related issues and found that staff training programmes tended to be impeded by limited resources.

10. In developing his human resources management strategy, the Secretary-General made a deliberate effort to integrate the objectives set for the advancement of women into the new management culture envisaged for the Secretariat. To date, 4,500 staff have been trained in the new performance appraisal system (PAS). PAS includes mandatory performance indicators to evaluate the extent to which managers and supervisors achieve gender balance in their immediate office. Gender sensitivity is emphasized in the people

management training programme being required of senior managers Secretariat-wide.

Recommendation 2 (a)

11. Improvements are currently being incorporated into the CCAQ database from which system-wide statistics are derived. In addition, the CCAQ secretariat is now reviewing with organizations the new data elements that could be introduced into the global common system database.

Recommendation 2 (b)

12. A brochure containing the policy statement of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) on the status of women is being published and will be made available to all organizations, including special interest groups (see also comments in para. 9 above concerning staff training efforts).

Recommendation 2 (c)

13. Many recent initiatives target all categories of staff, such as, for example, the ACC policy statements on (a) the work/family agenda for the common system and (b) combatting sexual harassment in the workplace. These have been followed up by a number of initiatives within individual organizations.

Recommendation 2 (d)

14. In 1994, the CCAQ Subcommittee on Staff Training developed two videos and a training manual for staff training in this area.

15. In January 1995, a joint staff-management task force began examining the effectiveness of the Organization's policies and procedures established in October 1992 to deal with sexual harassment in the workplace. In June 1995, the Staff Management Coordination Committee agreed to a task force proposal to survey United Nations staff in order to gauge the degree to which harassment exists in the United Nations workplace. The survey will be the first of such breadth and scope, making it a benchmark-setting exercise for the United Nations and its family of organizations and agencies. Staff at all duty stations of the Secretariat, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) will be guaranteed anonymity in completing the questionnaire. The survey, which is currently being developed and will be reviewed by a series of departmental focus groups, is scheduled for release in 1996.

Recommendations 2 (e) and (f)

16. The recent ACC policy statement on a work/family agenda for the common system will be published shortly as a brochure and made available to all organizations. In 1995, CCAQ decided that each organization should follow up on this policy with specific organizational policies and guidelines in keeping with each organization's structure and mandate. Other areas to be pursued at the inter-agency level by CCAQ are: proposals for short-term family leave, trends and experiences with flexi-place and current policies regulating salaries and

allowances and other entitlements to ensure that they are designed in a way that responds to family needs and are in step with modern thinking and practice.

Recommendation 2 (g)

17. In 1996, CCAQ intends to review "downsizing" experiences across the common system and to look further into the capacity of human resources departments to develop strategic approaches to downsizing and re-engineering the "human" organization.

Recommendation 2 (h)

18. The CCAQ and the ICSC secretariats are currently working with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), which is providing the technical expertise to make the ICSC vacancy announcement bulletin available on the Internet. This will ensure a wider dissemination of vacancies across the organizations of the common system. In 1995, CCAQ also agreed to undertake a study of the feasibility of developing an inter-agency roster of staff members. Both of these undertakings should help to identify a larger pool of potential women candidates for consideration for forthcoming vacancies in organizations.

19. In the area of spouse employment, a number of organizations have already taken steps to remove from their staff rules any impediments to the employment of spouses; others have taken some groundbreaking steps to increase cooperation to facilitate spouse employment. CCAQ has also agreed to pursue and monitor the following approaches: (a) extending the type of cooperation agreement on spouse employment reached by the Rome-based organizations across the common system; and (b) requesting lead organizations at each duty station to review impediments to and explore the possibility for liberalizing policies restricting the employment of domestic partners.

III. OTHER SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Current status, patterns and problems (paras. 24-42)

20. It should be noted that information in paragraph 33 of the report is somewhat misleading in regard to the resource commitments to women-related programming by some organizations and agencies. In the case of UNFPA, more than 50 per cent of resources have been earmarked for the reproductive health/family planning sector. In addition, funds are allocated for specific activities for women. The establishment of the FAO gender unit dates back to 1945, and the unit, which now has 10 Professional officers and the necessary support staff, has been well supported by FAO management for a number of years.

Sound action programmes in each organization (paras. 47-56)

21. Concerning the question of mainstreaming, it is agreed that there is a need to place greater emphasis on mainstreaming and to clarify its conceptual and operational implications. Mainstreaming women's issues into development policies and programmes at the national level, mainstreaming of women's concerns and the raising of gender awareness at recent United Nations conferences and a

wider integration of gender concerns in the work programmes of intergovernmental bodies have been visible examples of what is currently being done. In effect, mainstreaming requires that planners and policy makers incorporate a gender perspective into all of their activities. Such an approach will lead to encouraging further women's empowerment and active involvement in development in general. It should also help to eliminate the pitfalls of a purely women-specific approach, which has often led to (if not perpetuated) marginalization of women's issues. However, mainstreaming does not eliminate the need for targeting.

22. Gender and women's programmes must not be the concern of only a focal point, but must involve top management and be infused in the efforts of all staff in carrying out their work.

Gender training programmes (paras. 57-60)

23. In referring to recent findings, it was proposed that the observations, contained in the report, on the potential impact of gender training could have been slightly more nuanced. Three recent studies a/ suggest that there is very little evidence thus far to demonstrate the positive impact of gender training on organizational behaviour. At the same time, the point, made in paragraph 60 regarding the need to undertake further assessment of results obtained from past efforts in gender training, was well taken.

24. In addition to the information provided in the report on significant progress made in gender training by some organizations, it should be pointed out that experience has clearly shown the need for follow-up to gender training to ensure the translation of skills acquired into action. This applies in particular to operational programmes and country programming. Networking is in place among programme officers and focal points to exchange experience and to share information and expertise. Decentralized management structures and operations make gender orientation for country representatives and senior managers at all levels critical.

25. It should be pointed out that attitudinal and societal change must also take place at the national level. United Nations system initiatives, such as training of trainers, the publication of training manuals and handbooks and the convening of training workshops for government officials, have contributed to a greater understanding and promotion of the integration of a gender perspective into national development processes. Nevertheless, there still is a need for further assessment of the approaches taken to gender training and their impact at various levels.

26. Concerning gender training by the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), it should be clarified that the persons INSTRAW has trained are themselves trainers who will continue the training process within their countries, thus establishing a multiplier effect in gender training. INSTRAW and other entities have developed training materials on gender issues.

27. It should also be clarified that, by the end of 1993, FAO had held 43 training workshops for approximately 800 Professional officers, which

comprise approximately 85 per cent of all Professional officers in the organization. This remains the highest percentage within the United Nations system of Professional officers who have received such sensitization training. FAO emphasized that it was continuing to develop collaboratively with ILO and UNDP the innovative programme for gender training known as the Socio-Economic and Gender Analysis Programme.

28. It should be noted that the gender training programme of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) was developed in 1992 and is aimed at all UNIDO staff members at headquarters and in the field. A specific training manual has been prepared and is constantly updated and enriched by case-studies developed in the course of the training sessions. The objectives of the training programme are to provide UNIDO staff with a common understanding on gender issues and with practical guidance on how to integrate women and gender issues into their operational work.

29. The report could have benefited from incorporating information about ongoing inter-agency collaboration and networking on training and on the contribution of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy training subgroup to those activities.

Sharpening programme analysis (paras. 61-64)

30. It should be noted that a revised system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women is being prepared. In this regard, an effort had been made to highlight the particular comparative advantage of the United Nations system in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action agreed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in September 1995 (A/CONF.177/20, chap. I). The report's conclusion that there was need for a streamlined, transparent and pragmatic system of monitoring and follow-up to programmes for women is valid. The role of ACC, the Commission on the Status of Women, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly in this regard is especially important as a complement to the role of the respective governing bodies of the various entities of the United Nations system.

Regularizing inter-agency meetings (paras. 65-69)

31. The report stresses the contribution made by the ACC Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Meeting on Women, held since 1975 in conjunction with the meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women and in cooperation with the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat. There is unanimous support for regularizing this Meeting and for the report's conclusion that the meetings provide an irreplaceable opportunity for substantive discussions among agency representatives dealing with women's programming and for developing new initiatives and activities in this regard.

32. The Inter-Agency Meeting provided a unique opportunity for staff at the working level to meet and develop joint activities and inter-agency positions on issues before the Commission on the Status of Women. There is need to strengthen support for these meetings by ACC and the executive heads of the organizations of the United Nations system.

Assessing and enhancing resources (paras. 70-74)

33. Concerning a system-wide inventory of resources for women's advancement programmes, it should be recalled that the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) (as well as CCAQ(FB) in the past) regularly provides an overview report on the programmes and resources of the United Nations system, which, inter alia, includes programmes on the advancement of women (see E/1995/64, subsectors 173 and 174).

34. While some ACC members agreed with the assessment made in the report concerning the ability - or inability - to give accurate estimates of the resources allocated to programming to benefit women and to gender issues, the hope was expressed that ongoing revision of programme monitoring systems would improve the situation. Difficulties in making such assessments were attributed, inter alia, to the cross-sectoral nature of gender-responsive programming and to the inadequacy of programme monitoring systems to disaggregate allocations and expenditures by gender.

35. The increasing pursuit of gender mainstreaming strategies raises a number of additional methodological problems of calculating spending on programming to advance the status of women. In that regard, it would be unfortunate if mainstreaming were to be used as a cover to avoid committing resources to women in development/gender programmes. More thought should be given to the suitability of existing measurement and tracking systems for expenditures on both gender-responsive programmes and on those that specifically target women. The recommendations made in paragraph 73 of the report would be one approach to addressing this problem, but would require inputs from financial planners and the careful development of a suitable methodology for "unpacking" expenditures that impact on women.

36. In addition to the general assessment of the resources allocated to the advancement of women, a further breakdown should detail allocations to research and training and to operational activities as well as to information and outreach. This would make it possible, in future, to verify, with disaggregated statistics, whether "very few" resources are allocated to women's programmes.

New initiatives: the example of gender statistics (paras. 75-83)

37. ACC appreciates the importance given in the report to the programme on gender statistics and endorses the recommendations made on the programme. At the same time, it should be noted that the report, in its paragraph 87, omits to mention a computerized database operated by FAO, known as the World Agricultural Information Centre (WAICENT), into which gender-disaggregated data is entered.

38. The report's assessment of the significance of the publication and updating of The World's Women is encouraging. However, UNFPA involvement in funding national censuses and ensuring that the data are collected, analysed and disseminated as disaggregated by gender was not reflected in the report. It should also be noted that FAO had contributed to producing The World's Women 1995, particularly in ensuring that rural women were accorded appropriate attention. It is also of relevance that inter-agency follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women offers opportunities for similar efforts in areas

covered by the Platform for Action and the Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Meeting on Women should discuss ways and means of coordinating such inputs in future and make a proposal to ACC in this regard.

Information outreach and quality (paras. 84-93)

39. ACC agrees with the report's analysis of information outreach and quality. The points on electronic information networks are particularly important. There is need for a rational system of collection, organization and dissemination of the varied information on women and gender produced by the United Nations system. Of particular interest is the proposal for the establishment of a joint World Wide Web site aimed at promoting the use of new technologies among women's organizations and improving the outreach of information from the United Nations system on women's advancement. In the initial phase, the emphasis will be on information from the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat, INSTRAW and UNIFEM. In a second phase, if resources permit, the project would be extended to the system as a whole.

40. A number of agencies pursued additional information activities, especially the production and dissemination of information in the framework of the Fourth World Conference on Women, including updated bibliographies, videos and films. Efforts will be made to update and complete the selected bibliography presented in annex II to the report, while the resource centre of the Division for the Advancement of Women should continue to be a repository for materials produced by the United Nations system on women and gender issues.

Interaction with non-governmental organizations (paras. 94-99)

41. It is indisputable that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are particularly important in women's programmes. Many United Nations entities have long-standing and close working relationships with NGOs at the country level, as well as with NGOs that are based at the headquarters of the respective agencies. The worldwide network of NGO committees of UNICEF is one example. In response to the International Conference on Population and Development, UNFPA has established an NGO Advisory Committee at the international level to advise the Fund on policy and programming matters, and to promote a more active involvement of NGOs, especially in advocacy. The Division for the Advancement of Women maintains a database of over 2000 NGOs that were accredited to the Fourth World Conference on Women, and has plans to increase its outreach to this important constituency.

42. In some cases, NGOs carry out projects funded by United Nations agencies and work closely with implementing agencies. They serve as fundraisers and as advocates for United Nations programmes. They also sometimes serve as a link between United Nations agencies and Governments. Likewise, United Nations agencies have also invested in enhancing the capacities and roles of women's groups and of professional associations at the national level, which will be crucial for sustainability of development cooperation.

Governing body support (paras. 100-105)

43. ACC agrees with the report's observations on governing body support. It should be noted that other governing bodies, besides those mentioned in the report, have been very supportive of gender issues. The FAO governing body, the FAO Conference, has given regular and serious attention to the advancement of women through the organization's programmes, including the systematic review of the implementation of the FAO Plan of Action for Women in Development and the adoption of a revised Plan of Action for 1996-2001 by the FAO Conference at its twenty-eighth session in November 1995. The UNICEF Executive Board, at its most recent session in January 1996, considered follow-up proposals to the Fourth World Conference on Women and made specific recommendations to focus, inter alia, on women's human rights.

Notes

a/ "Gender as a cross-cutting theme in development assistance - an evaluation of CIDA's WID policy and activities, 1984-1992", final report of the Audit and Evaluation Division, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), July 1993;

"Gender mainstreaming: a study of efforts by UNDP, the World Bank and ILO to institutionalize gender issues", United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)/UNDP occasional paper No. 4, August 1995;

"Technical assistance and women: from mainstreaming towards institutional accountability", report of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/CN.6/1995/6).